



SRINIKETAN AND TAGORE'S CONCEPT OF RURAL RECONSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

The idea of Rural Reconstruction emanates from Tagore by his deep insights into the challenges of Rural India. Like Gandhiji, Tagore also dreamt of strong and self-reliant India. He had a firm conviction that without the knowledge of rural India, education would be incomplete. A formidable part of India constitutes the villages, yet it struggles for development. For this, Tagore established Sriniketan as a centre for rural reconstruction which will ultimately equip the farmers economically developed, self-sufficient, co-operative and nature-oriented. Socially useful productive work was too much prioritized for nurturing the creative potential of the rural children. Being concerned about the women empowerment, he set up Mahila Samities. Last but not the least, his scheme of Rural Reconstruction is an exemplary for many developments in Independent India. So, the present paper is an attempt to analyze the Tagore's scheme of rural reconstruction and its relevance in the present context.

KEYWORDS: Rural Reconstruction, Socially Useful Productive Work, Self-Reliant, Economic Development, Women Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Rural Development for Modern India actually owes its origin in the Gandhian thought. Gandhiji realized that the fate of a nation like India depends much on the development of village. For that he wanted to recognize the village from the grass-root level. 'Gram Swaraj' was such an innovative idea of rural administration. Mahatma Gandhi also felt that the very basis of Indian civilization is in the village. Through constructive work, skill, insight, and with a spirit of patriotic zeal, these huge cults of village people and slum dwellers should be made the direct beneficiary of development. During 1920s and 1930s, such kind of initiatives took place at different parts of the country of which Sriniketan Experiment by Tagore was noteworthy. Instead of Rural Development, Tagore was in favour of using the term Rural Reconstruction. The Sriniketan Experiment on Rural Reconstruction, conceived by Tagore in early 1922, fostering the aim "to bring back life in its completeness into the villages, making them self-reliant and self-respectful, acquainted with the cultural tradition of their own country and competent to make an efficient use of modern resources for the improvement of their physical, intellectual and economic conditions".¹ The sole intention of Sriniketan Experiment was the upliftment of the villages.

Objective of The Study

The present paper aimed to (a) To study the implication of Tagore's scheme of Rural Development and (b) To investigate Tagore's initiatives for women empowerment.

Methodology

The methodology adopted in this paper is purely descriptive and data and required information are collected from different secondary sources like journals, books, Govt report, Gazette and internet and analyzed critically to draw conclusion.

Relevance of Rural Development:

In Independent India, the first national level rural development program started in the year 1952 as an initiative to Community Development Program. Later the consecutive Five Year Plans highlighted these concepts like Community Development Program, Cooperative Farming, Self-Employment etc. According to Sixth Five-Year Plan,² the following are the objectives of rural development:

- i. To generate employment opportunities.
- ii. To ensure the basic needs of health and education.
- iii. To increase the standard of living of the poor people.

Keeping these objectives in mind, Tagore tried to inspire the non-privileged section of the rural society to self-reliance and to make them economically dependent. Actually the idea of doing something for rural development originated in 1980s when Tagore went to east-Bengal to monitor his family's agricultural estate. Tagore truly realized that only through the upliftment of rural people we can keep pace with the rest of the world in both education and industrialization. The very essence of Sriniketan lies on the principle of humanism, internationalism and sustainable development. The views of Tagore regarding rural India emanates from his deep insight into the challenges of rural India. The village life cast a deep impression on his mind. Tagore was really touched by the gross suffering and poverty of the rural people. Being a Zemindar, he was not interested in the profit making but felt a strong urge for doing

something for the poor people. Like a humanist his heart ached for the poor villagers. He nurtured it till the last day of his life. With a view to promoting a happy, conditioned and human life in the village, Tagore established an institution of Rural Reconstruction and special attention being made to the encouragement of cottage industries. In 'Swadeshi Samaj', Tagore critically analyzed the underlying causes of the disintegrated rural life and made an attempt to organize them. To alleviate the poverty of the rural people, he insisted on building collective atmosphere in the villages. Guided by his own philosophy and strongly disgusted with the colonial system of education, he got his dream fulfilled by establishing Shantiniketan and Sriniketan'. Tagore truly believed that without developing rural India, India could never prosper as a nation. For the upliftment of these poor villagers, Tagore set up Sriniketan keeping in mind the four principles: self-reliant, self-respect, self-interest and joy in work. The activities of Sriniketan spread over around 50 neighbouring villages and the activities includes i) village welfare ii) agriculture iii) industry iv) health and sanitation v) education vi) economic vii) cooperation and viii) Brati Balaka (Scout) Organization.⁴

Tagore's schemes of Rural Construction:

In order to awaken the nation on the basis of human relationship, Tagore concentrated his mind to educate the people of the villages. The key factor that Tagore championed in his scheme of rural reconstruction was the economic development of the farmers by equipping them with better and technologically improved instruments which will ultimately enhance the farmer's living conditions, creating job opportunities and wiping out the poverty. Tagore truly realized university should have community relevance. It is accountable for community development and contact. According to Tagore, education should help an individual for the fullest development of his personality. Sriniketan symbolizes education for mind and soul whereas, Viswa-Bharati represents the meeting place of East and West and Sreeniketan epitomizes for hand. The combined approaches of these three institutions make education complete and comprehensive. Tagore conceived the idea of Sreeniketan as a centre of rural welfare. L.K. Elmhirst and Kalimohan ghosh⁵ tried their best and helped Tagore to make his dream fulfilled. In his letter to Elmhirst, concerning rural reconstruction work, Tagore wrote "the work which you have started in Surul is a work of creation, for in it you are not following some fixed path prescribed in books, but giving expression to your own creative personality to which even the opposition of the obdurate materials ultimately brings help for shaping the structure".⁶ As a centre for rural development, Sreeniketan sets forth the following objectives: i) to alleviate the problems of the villagers and cultivators by making a good rapport with them. ii) to experiment on the problem that the villagers and cultivators encountered. iii) to impart them training on arts and crafts and iv) emphasis was given on acquiring practical experience on cultivation, carpentry, animal husbandry, smithing and weaving so that the villagers become self-sufficient. Sreeniketan was the result of poet's long-cherished dream of establishing a university to address intensively the greater community life. In course of time, Sreeniketan performed the rural welfare activities of Viswa-Bharati. All the objectives mentioned, got their practical utility by the effort of Tagore himself. He established craft centre, cooperative society, agricultural farm for the development and welfare of the village community. Krishi Bank was such an endeavour to redeem the misery of the poor farmers by lending them money at a cheaper interest rate. Later, Viswa-Bharati Central Cooperative Bank was set up in 1927 for this purpose. Tagore was deeply

sorrowed by the decay and destruction of rural India and the growing concern for the accumulation of wealth in the hands of few. In his words "Today our villages are half-dead. If we imagine, we can just continue to live that would be a mistake. The dying can pull the living only towards death."⁷ Here, Tagore is strikingly different from other educationist in the sense, what he dreamed of he gave a practical shape by setting up different schools and societies.⁸ The Santal boys are equipped to perform at the anniversary celebration held in Sreeniketan in February. During this time, Halkarshan (Ploughing) was observed with great enthusiasm. In order to save Nature from the clutches of environmental pollution, Tagore started Tree-Plantation program in 1930. The craft worker got a chance to showcase their products through the exhibitions. Pous Mela organized every year to give a platform to exhibit different craft and products at reasonable rate. 'Siksha Satra' being attached to Sreeniketan, provided ample scope for the poor rural children for nurturing their creative potentialities and to achieve work experience through playful work. Project Method is fully utilized to impart students a direct experience of handicraft to housecraft. The future of a nation depends on the children and their contribution to national development of a country is huge. So, they should be properly and equally treated irrespective of caste and creed, poor and rich & urban and rural. Lessons to be imparted in the bounty of nature which includes sports and games, N.C.C., N.S.S, Handicraft, Drawing and Painting, Horticulture, Woodwork, weaving etc. To provide proper training to these rural craftsmen Shilpa Bhaban was established so that they can find their own vocation. Through these socially useful productive works, the children will be equipped for total development. Last but not the least, his strong urge for empowering women and ensuring economic and social welfare of the community led him to establish Women's Association or Mahila Samities.

Challenges of Rural Development:

India is a country where villages form the very basis of growth and development. They act as the building block of our country. Most of the people living in Indian villages mainly rely on agriculture which constitutes 17% of Indian GDP, much higher than the world average of 6.1 %. Around 72 % of the total population lives in 6.5 lakh of villages in India⁹. The huge mass represents the real India. The progress of India will be halted if the rural people be left far behind from development. The key indicator of rural development lies on the factors like better livelihood opportunities, eradication of poverty and ample scope for basic amenities and self employment. To address all these problems required for the adoption of an extensive program which had long been cherished by Tagore. He took the pioneering role in the area of rural reconstruction by improving the situation of the villagers and rural artisans. Villages form the building block in our country like India and agriculture being the main source of India it contributes significantly to the country's increased GDP. Despite this fact, the trend of migrating people from village to town has steadily increased over the past few years. Rural development is the only panacea for this rural urban migration. Now it is time for how reverse migration can be done. Tagore expressed his great concern for the migration of people to town which highly affected the rural society. So, there should be balance between town and city. Both are benefited in this way and the relationship between village and city is complimentary. The concept of Smart Village¹⁰ needs well-designed plan to implement. A holistic approach can only be fruitful in this regard. Regarding employability in rural India, Women constitute around 50 percent of the population and contributed significantly in the labour force by engaging themselves in handloom and handicraft, food processing and micro enterprising. But due to their poor standard of education, they could not commercialize their product which ultimately affects the quality of life. Co-operative principle to be applied in the task of general welfare by merging different villages as regional units that would include schools, workshops, granaries, co-operative stores and banks as also common meeting places for enjoyment and settling of disputes. But after independence various factors that led to the rural development getting complex are the changing socio-political scenario and decentralization etc.

CONCLUSION

Tagore took a pioneering role in the field of rural development. But his ideas were not implemented instead rote learning is still the norm. The sooner his scheme of rural reconstruction be adopted by the other universities in India, the earlier will be resolved the problems that ached rural India. In order to transform India into a healthy and prosperous nation, the agricultural sectors which contribute around 14% of the national GDP needs to be revamped. This sector has the potential to support approximately 55% workforce. The entrepreneurial skill that Tagore wanted to grow among the students of Sreeniketan got reflected in the National Policy on Farmers-2007¹¹, where steps have been adopted to lure the youth in farming and the processing of farm products. The quest for knowledge will come true when the students can try to find the solution of the problems of the country in their studied subjects. Siksha-Satra primarily aimed to enhance the all-round development of the students. Moreover, the other two branches of Sreeniketan i.e. Pally-Sanghatan & Pally-Sikha bhaban were working relentlessly through the years. This year Sreeniketan completes its hundred years of establishment. But it is still unparalleled in excellence and committed in fulfilling its avowed promise.¹² The Sreeniketan concept can be applied to rejuvenate any society in the world which is timid and exhausted. Reaching at the doorstep of 21st century, we still have to resort Tagore's ideas and ideals. Modern Panchayet System, Vocational Education, women Empowerment, Sustainable Development, Self-Reliance, Block Development, community Development: for all these concepts, Tagore be called the fore-

runner and the true visionary. Jawaharlal Nehru rightly commented that "he who has not visited Shantiniketan has not seen India"¹³

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